

Sharing the Inventory

Step Five

“This is the step that separates the men from boys” (or the girls from women). Step Five breaks the pattern of secrets and isolation that have kept us drunk and held down by our disease.”

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, page 63

Your Sponsor is one of the tools of the program and like any tool it will not help you if you do not use it appropriately. Your Sponsor will give you some directions on how your Fifth Step will be conducted — the place, time, duration, and process.

Most Fifth Steps are done with the Sponsor and the person whose Fifth Step is being heard separated from distractions. Your Sponsor may want you to go to a special location (your home, the Sponsor’s home, a peaceful outdoor location, etc.) to get this personal time — the goal is to remove distractions so you can concentrate on the work of breaking the lifetime habit of keeping the secrets and hiding the truth from yourself and others.

This is when you will use Column Four on your Inventory. It is commonly called “What is Your Part?”

Before taking Step Five we are given some specific directions to review our work so far.

“If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments. We have begun to comprehend their futility and their

fatality. We have commenced to see their terrible destructiveness. We have begun to learn tolerance, patience and good will toward all men, even our enemies, for we look on them as sick people. We have listed the people we have hurt by our conduct, and are willing to straighten out the past if we can. “

Big Book, page 70

“When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time. We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk. We explain to our partner what we are about to do and why we have to do it. He should realize that we are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached in this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by our confidence.”

Big Book, page 75

There is no “perfect” Fourth Step — the World Service Office is not reserving a special niche for your inventory to show the world how an inventory should be done. You do your Fourth the very best you can do it and, most often, will find that there is enough relief from the past to move forward with your Recovery.

There is only one way to do it wrong. To not do it!

Your Sponsor will probably ask questions to clarify some of the points you have written. It will be your opportunity to give more detail on the 19 words you were allowed for on your list.

You may be directed to write into the fourth column of the inventory to identify the exact nature of the problem. What was your part in this entry on the Inventory? What does it tell you

about yourself, your personal defects, or your shortcomings?

A Sponsor will usually tell you something of their own story to show how they have had to deal with items from their own Inventory to give you a real example of how a similar problem was handled in the Sponsor's own inventory. Your Sponsor will also guide you away from focus on how others have harmed you, but how you have participated in the process of stepping on their toes and causing them to retaliate. Sometimes a Sponsor will need to point out when you have been taking something as a personal injury that was simply a fact of life affecting others at the same time.

On page 46 of the Twelve and Twelve it says:

"The sponsor probably points out that the newcomer has some assets which can be noted along with his liabilities. This tends to clear away morbidity and encourage balance. As soon as he begins to be more objective, the newcomer can fearlessly, rather than fearfully, look at his own defects."

You do not need to understand the process. This is not about building your intellectual strength, but getting down to the basic, honest feelings that have been the foundation of your resentments, fears, and relationships.

Let your Sponsor guide you and know that there is nothing on your list that does not have a name — and a name means someone else has done it, felt it, or had to deal with it. You are not alone.

It is important that you not try to do a Fifth Step alone. You use an Inventory to focus on your own problems, not the defects of the names on your lists. It is for you, your discovery of your own defects and short-comings, your own spiritual journey, and cleaning your side of the street.

You will most likely think of more to go on an inventory after you do your Fifth Step and it doesn't matter what you call the continuation of your Inventory. The Tenth Step says "Continued to take personal inventory..." so you might want to look at additions as part of your Tenth Step or a new Fourth Step.

You may find there is a particular area of your life where you want to focus on a new inventory — your marriage, secret crimes (such as stealing, hidden judgments, gossip, withholding care or money, or connection with children or parents, etc.). Discuss these with your Sponsor to determine the best way to approach such new housecleanings.

The only thing that matters is doing the Work and putting pen to paper. Just do it. Your Fourth Step is a real milestone in your commitment and progress to your Recovery.

If you've answered the above questions to your satisfaction, you're ready for Steps 6 & 7.